

E. R. Jones

Christ's Testimony
to Moses

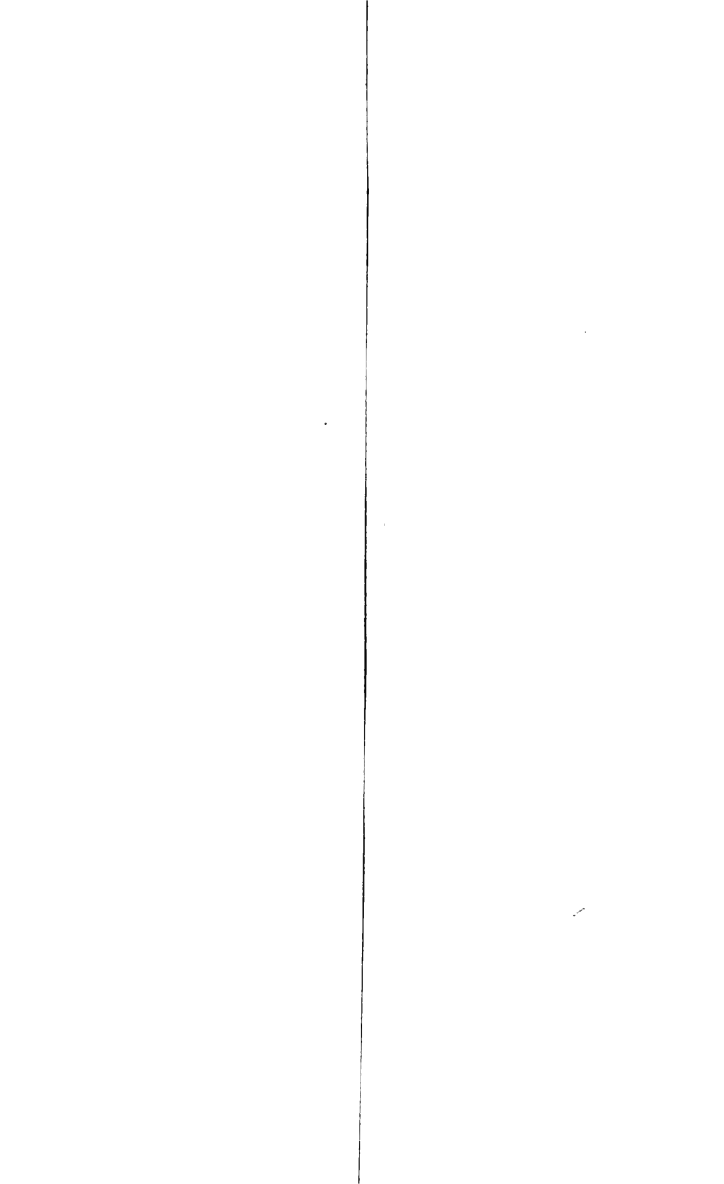
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Christ's testimony to Moses : a sermon

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CHRIST'S TESTIMONY TO MOSES

A Sermon

PREACHED IN THE PARISH CHURCH OF ST. ANNE, LIMEHOUSE,

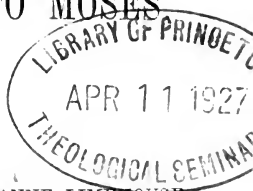
On Sunday, Nov. 16th, 1862,

WITH REFERENCE TO BISHOP COLENZO'S WORK ON
THE PENTATEUCH.

BY
EDWARD RHYS JONES, M.A.,
RECTOR OF LIMEHOUSE, AND
RURAL DEAN.

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NOTHING but a grave occasion would justify the use of the pulpit for the notice and censure of a particular book ; but the immense importance of the questions recently raised, and the extraordinary publicity and interest which the controversy has acquired, supply, it is hoped, a sufficient apology.

The following Sermon is committed to the press in compliance with the wish of some who heard it, and with the earnest hope and prayer, that the suggestions it contains may help to supply some inquiring minds with a clue to the solution of their difficulties, and issue in their being "established in the present truth."

It may be added, that just after sending this Sermon to the Printer, the Author received a special request for its publication from the LIMEHOUSE CHURCH OF ENGLAND YOUNG MEN'S SOCIETY.

CHRIST'S TESTIMONY TO MOSES.

ST. JOHN v. 46, 47.

“Had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me.
“But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words?”

THE Jews of our Lord's day, and especially the Pharisees, were accustomed to pride themselves on the possession and knowledge of the Old Testament Scriptures, and especially of the five books of Moses. Thus, when a blind man, to whom our Lord had given sight, was boldly persisting in his testimony to Jesus, he was met with this reply, “Thou art His disciple, but we are Moses' disciples. We know that God spake unto Moses; as for this fellow, we know not from whence He is.” (John ix. 28, 29.)

On the other hand, many Christians of the present day take up the reverse position, and say—some in so many words—and many more in words really amounting to the same thing, “We know that God spake unto Jesus Christ; but as for Moses, we know not from whence he is.” They profess to acknowledge the authority of Christ, they appeal from Moses to Christ, let them then hear what Christ says respecting the question at issue. Observe the verse which precedes the text:—“Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father: there is one that accuseth you, even Moses, in whom ye trust.” Does our Lord proceed to tell these Jews that they were wrong in trusting in Moses? Does He assert that Moses was not a trustworthy author? Does He affirm that Moses was guilty of many errors or mistakes in his books, or, that the five books which bear his name were not written by him at all, but by some anonymous author or authors,

who used his name to pass off their own erroneous compositions? In a word, does Jesus Christ say, as has been said, in a work just published, "that the Pentateuch as a whole was not written by Moses, and that, with respect to some at least of the chief portions of the story, it cannot be regarded as historically true?" (p. 13.) Far otherwise. In one single clause of the text he confutes both the statements just quoted:—"He wrote of me,"—As if He had said, You are right in regarding the five books which bear the name of Moses as written by him—"He wrote" them. And again, What he wrote is true. I do not caution you against placing too implicit a credit in all the contents of those books; but while all are true, some parts call for your special notice, as bearing immediately on the question, whether, or not, I am the promised Messiah—"He wrote of me."

The grand error of the Jews of that day was, not that they believed Moses too much, but that they believed Him too little. They had not studied his writings with sufficient attention, and with prayer for the teaching of that Holy Spirit by whom Moses was inspired. In fact, they did not really believe Moses, for, as our Lord says, "Had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed Me; for he wrote of Me. But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe My words?"

Nor was this the only occasion on which our Lord appealed to Moses, as one about whose writings there was no question.

Let me remind you of several well-known passages. Our Lord represents Abraham as saying to the rich man, who had asked that Lazarus might be sent from the dead, to testify to his five brethren, "They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them." And when the rich man again urged his request—"Nay, father Abraham, but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent"—Abraham replied, and our Lord evidently intended his answer to be regarded as true, and decisive, and enunciating a great general principle—"If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead." (Luke xvi. 29—31.)

Again, during His last visit to Jerusalem, a few days before His crucifixion, our Lord, arguing with the Sadducees, who disbelieved the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead, refers them to the testimony of Moses as conclusive—"Now that the

dead are raised, even Moses showed at the bush"—in his history of the burning bush. (Luke xx. 37.)

So again, when our Lord joined the two disciples, as they walked to Emmaus, on the evening of His resurrection, we read that "Beginning at Moses and all the prophets, He expounded unto them in all the Scriptures, the things concerning Himself." (Luke xxiv. 27.)

Once more. We find it recorded among the last words which our Blessed Lord spoke on earth, before He ascended to the Father,—“These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the law of Moses, and in the Psalms, and in the prophets concerning Me.” (Luke xxiv. 44.)

You will have observed that in none of these passages in which our Lord refers to the writings of Moses, and builds very important arguments upon them, does He throw out the slightest hint that those writings were to be received with suspicion, hesitation, or caution. On the contrary, He places them on exactly the same footing with the other books of the Old Testament, and appeals to them as not only true, but divinely inspired.

In addition to these passages, in which our Lord refers to the writings of Moses by name, it may be well to notice a few others, in which, though He does not expressly name Moses, He evidently refers to his writings, and as it were, sets His seal to the truth of portions of the Mosaic history which have been especially called in question.

When the Pharisees had proposed to our Lord a question respecting divorce, “He answered and said unto them, Have ye not read that He which made them at the beginning made them male and female, and said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore,” He adds, “they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let no man put asunder.” (Matt. xix. 4—6.) Here our Lord evidently refers to the Mosaic history of the creation of man, as related in Gen. ii., and He does so without giving the slightest hint that that chapter was not written by Moses, or that it is not a true history. On the contrary, his whole argu-

ment is based on that which Moses asserts as a fact, but which many now deny, that God originally created man one pair—a male and a female—and that the whole human race are descended from that one pair.

Again, with reference to the Deluge—The book to which I have alluded affects to treat the account as altogether unhistorical. (Preface, p. viii.) But can we doubt what view our Lord took of that awful and mysterious history, when we find Him expressly referring to it, in illustration of the suddenness of His second coming. “And as it was in the days of Noe, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man. They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, and the flood came, and destroyed them all.” (Luke xvii. 26.)

Is it at all credible, can we possibly believe, that on such an occasion as this, when our Lord was foretelling that great and solemn event, by which the present dispensation will be brought to a close—His own coming in glory—He would thus have referred to the history of the Deluge as a true history (which His disciples and all the Jews supposed it to be), if it had been, to use the guarded word of the author referred to, “Unhistorical,” or, as he evidently regards it, a fiction; though, to give his own explanation, not a fiction in the sense in which the word is frequently understood—as “implying a conscious dishonesty on the part of the writer—an intention to deceive.” (Preface, p. xvii.)

No, we may safely conclude from the way in which our Lord here speaks of the Flood, that He intended His disciples to continue to believe, as they always had believed, and as the Jews to the present day believe, that the Deluge was a real historical event, and not in any sense of the word a fiction.

Having thus referred to the Deluge, our Lord proceeds to illustrate His subject further by referring to another similar event, which has also been doubted and disbelieved by many:—“Likewise also as it was in the days of Lot, they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded: but the same day that Lot went out of Sodom, it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all. Even thus shall it be in the days when the Son of man is revealed.”

And then a little further on, singling out that particular detail which in the whole history might seem the most open to question, He says with solemn emphasis—"Remember Lot's wife." (Luke xvii. 28—30, 32.)

The proofs I have alleged are, I venture to hope, sufficient to show, not only that our Lord quoted from the writings of Moses, and appealed to them as authoritative, but also that He regarded them as, in the fullest sense of the word, historical, as containing true histories of real events—correct accounts of actual matters of fact.

To most of us the line of argument I have been pursuing will appear entirely satisfactory and conclusive. If our Lord Jesus Christ regarded the Pentateuch as written by Moses, and as containing true history, we cannot feel a moment's hesitation in receiving it as such ourselves.

But alas! what appears to us an irrefragable proof, fails to carry conviction to the minds of some—and those not merely professing Christians—but men of influence and authority in our Church. It is with deep pain that I quote the three arguments by which the author I have already referred to seeks to neutralize the sanction given by our Lord to the Pentateuch.

i. He says that our Lord's words in attestation of Moses apply only to certain parts of the Pentateuch. (Preface, p. xxx.) and in proof of this he alleges that the last chapter of Deuteronomy, which records the death of Moses, could not have been written by his hand. Of course no one ever thought for a moment that it was. The Jews never thought so; they believed it was added by Joshua, to make the book complete. But the Jews always have believed that the rest of the Pentateuch was written by Moses, with the exception of a verse or two here and there, which may have been inserted by Ezra, when collecting and editing those Old Testament Scriptures which had been written down to his time. And if, as is now asserted, the greater part of the Pentateuch (and not merely that one short chapter) was composed by other, and those inaccurate writers, can we believe that our Lord would not have cautioned the Jews against regarding Moses as its author?

ii. His second argument is, "It may be said that our Lord did but *accommodate* His words to the current popular language of the day." (Preface, p. xxxi.) But when we consider the grave earnestness with which our Lord always spoke, and the exceeding solemnity of several of the occasions to which I have referred, it seems strange that any devout reader should for a moment suppose that our Lord was merely accommodating His words to current popular language—language which was incorrect and unhistorical?

iii. The third argument is the worst and most painful of all; it is this:—"It is perfectly consistent with the most entire and sincere belief in our Lord's divinity, to hold, as many do, that when He vouchsafed to become 'a Son of man,' He took our nature fully, and voluntarily entered into all the conditions of humanity, and among others, into that which makes our growth in all ordinary knowledge *gradual* and *limited*. We are expressly told in Luke ii. 52, that 'Jesus increased in *wisdom*,' as well as in 'stature.' It is not supposed that in His human nature He was acquainted, more than any educated Jew of the age, with the mysteries of all modern science; nor with St. Luke's expressions before us, can it be seriously maintained, that as an *infant* or *young child* He possessed a knowledge surpassing that of the most pious and learned adults of His nation, upon the subject of the authorship and age of the different portions of the Pentateuch. At what period, then, of His life upon earth is it to be supposed that He had granted to Him, as the Son of man, *supernaturally*, full and accurate information on these points, so that He should be expected to speak about the Pentateuch in other terms than any other devout Jew of that day would have employed. Why should it be thought that He would speak with certain *Divine* knowledge on this matter, more than upon other matters of ordinary science or history." (Preface, pp. xxxi. xxxii.)

To this we would reply—It is perfectly true—it is one of the mysterious facts connected with the union of the Godhead and manhood in the person of our Lord, that His human mind grew in wisdom, made gradual attainments in knowledge; but how rapid was that growth, how extensive those gradual attainments, is evident from the fact that, when at the age of twelve years,

He was hearing the doctors in the temple, and asking them questions, "All that heard Him were astonished at His understanding and answers." (Luke ii. 47.)

But did our Lord's growth in wisdom and knowledge always proceed in the same gradual manner? was there no period in His life when He received "supernaturally, full and accurate information" respecting the truth of God, including, (we may assume,) all things connected with the Pentateuch, as well as with the rest of the Old Testament Scriptures? The author assumes there was not. But how then are we to regard the history of our Lord's Baptism? Was not this such a period as that inquired for, when the heaven was opened, and the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon Him, and Jesus, "being full of the Holy Ghost returned from Jordan?" (Luke iv. 1.) Did our Lord speak as if He knew no more about the Pentateuch and the rest of Scripture than any other devout Jew of that day? Surely we cannot think so, when we remember His words to Nicodemus, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness. . . . And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but He that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven." (John iii. 11—13.) So again, after incidentally confirming the Mosaic history with reference to the feeding of the children of Israel with manna from heaven, our Lord, referring in like manner to His heavenly origin, and His residence with the Father before He came into the world, as a proof of the truth and divine character of His teaching, says, "What and if ye shall see the Son of man ascend up where He was before? It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life." (John vi. 62, 63.) And John the Baptist, referring to Him, says, "He whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God: for God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto Him." (John iii. 34.)

Is it possible to conceive, that He who speaks thus of His own authority, and His own teaching—He to whom His forerunner bears testimony as having received the Holy Spirit, not as others do, in measure, but without measure—He who could read the very thoughts of men's minds—knew as little about

Moses and the Pentateuch, and could speak with as little certain knowledge respecting them as any other devout Jew of that day?

But it will be said that these five books of Moses are so full of extraordinary statements, which it is impossible for intelligent, sensible men to believe, that we are obliged to fall back upon such arguments as those which I have just been quoting, to account for our Lord having given them His sanction.

Let us then briefly notice a few of those statements which are alleged to be utterly incredible. It is of course impossible to include a review of the whole book within the limits of a sermon; but I will touch upon those which seem at first sight to present the greatest difficulty, noticing them under the three heads—of Moral, Physical, and Arithmetical.

I. The *moral* difficulties, although the most important, are but slightly touched upon. The following laws are quoted as “professedly coming from the Holy and Blessed One, the Father and ‘Faithful Creator’ of all mankind,” “‘If the master (of a Hebrew servant) have given him a wife, and she have borne him sons or daughters, the wife and her children shall be her master’s, and he shall go out by himself,’ (Exodus xxi. 4); the wife and children in such a case being placed under the protection of such other words as these, ‘If a man smite his servant, or his maid, with a rod, and he die under his hand; he shall surely be punished. Notwithstanding, if he continue a day or two, he shall not be punished: for he is his money.’” (Exodus xxi. 20, 21.) Now, we must remember, that in the time of Moses slavery existed among all nations; but the Mosaic law, so far from making the condition of slaves more painful and oppressive, secured for it many and great alleviations. Who can read the words added to the Fourth Commandment, “That thy manservant and thy maidservant may rest as well as thou,” (Deut. v. 14), without perceiving that here is a most merciful provision for mitigating the condition of a slave—a provision utterly unknown in any other code of laws previous to the coming of our Lord. While, among other nations, the master had absolute power of life and death over his slaves, the Jew who killed his slave was to be surely punished; but in case the slave survived

a day or two, the master was exempt from punishment, "for he is his money,"—not (as the matter was regarded by other nations) the slave is the mere property of his master; part of his goods and chattels: but—as the master has purchased him with a considerable sum of money, he cannot be supposed to have intended to kill him. In such a case the master was "not to be punished by the magistrate, but left to the judgment of God;"* and the concession thus made is to be accounted for on the same principle as the Jewish law of divorce, "because of the hardness of their hearts." (Matt. xix. 8.)

Another objection of a moral nature is presented in a very painful and irreverent form. It is recorded, (Numb. xxxi.), that after the Midianites had beguiled the Israelites into very heinous sins, the Lord commanded Israel to go forth against them to battle, and to slay all the male inhabitants, and all the married women, sparing none except the unmarried women and the female children. I forbear to quote the flippant words in which the author expresses himself with reference to this "tragedy." (p. 144.) His view of the extermination of the Midianites and the other inhabitants of Canaan is utterly opposed to the whole spirit of the narrative, and to the view which has almost universally been adopted by devout and learned students of Mosaic history in every age of the Church. † It was not for the gratification of their own revengeful passions, that the Israelites were permitted, nay, commanded to exterminate their enemies. It was as an act of divine retribution for the abominable wickedness of those nations. The Jews were the executioners, appointed by the Lord to carry out His purposes. And in the death of the little children, who had not committed actual sin, we see the carrying out of that which has been the Lord's mode of proceeding in every age of the world—an execution of the threatening recorded in the Second Commandment, in which the Lord describes Himself as "a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate Him." The Israelites, I say, were God's executioners in this instance, carrying out His express commands; and, in case of disobedience, they would

* Scott.

† See especially Dean Graves on the Pentateuch.

have incurred the same divine displeasure which at a later period fell upon Saul, when he spared the king of Amaleck, instead of slaying him, as the Lord had commanded. To kill these young children in obedience to the express command of God, was a plain, but awful duty; to have killed them without such a command, would have been a heinous crime.

II. I pass on to the second class of difficulties—those which may be called *physical*.

The author denies that a universal Deluge, such as the Bible manifestly speaks of, could have possibly taken place in the way described in the book of Genesis. (Preface, pp. vii., viii.)

But we have seen that our Lord Himself spoke of the Deluge as an event which really took place. And St. Peter, foretelling the rise of scoffers in the last days, who shall ask contemptuously, “Where is the promise of His coming?” accounts for their unbelief, by saying that they are “willingly (wilfully) ignorant that the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished.” (2 Peter iii. 6.)

That such a flood actually did take place has been the universal belief of the Jewish nation. Their belief is confirmed by the ancient records of many heathen nations. Our Lord attests it. And every Christian must believe it. With regard to the way in which it took place, and whether it included the whole earth, or only that part of the earth which was then inhabited, this is an open question; and the usage of Scripture would certainly allow us to understand the word “earth” in that limited meaning.

Again: the author assumes that the standing still of the sun, as related in the Book of Joshua, is utterly incredible. (Preface, p. x.) But no reasonable person would now understand the expression literally, any more than we understand that the sun literally rises and sets; however commonly such expressions are used, not only by the unlearned and ignorant, but by astronomers. All that we need understand is, that daylight was miraculously prolonged; but by what process this phenomenon was brought to pass it is beyond our power to comprehend.

Again: with these difficulties is classed the story of Balaam’s ass speaking with human voice, (p. 8); yet St. Peter, writing by inspi-

ration of God, has assured us that "the dumb ass, speaking with man's voice, forbad the madness of the prophet." (2 Peter ii. 16.)

These, and other physical difficulties, which in every age have been alleged against the divine authority of Scripture, are not more difficult, not more inexplicable than the great miracle of the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, and "if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain." (1 Cor. xv. 14.)

The miracles of the Bible stand or fall together. If you deny one, you may as well deny all; yes, even that greatest of all miracles, to which the Holy Catholic Church throughout all the world bears public testimony every week, by keeping the first day holy.

III. Lastly, we come to those difficulties which I have called *arithmetical*, and to which the largest part of the book is devoted.

Many of these difficulties are connected with the number of the Israelites who came out of Egypt, which is stated at six hundred thousand men, besides women and children, amounting in all to upwards of two millions. Difficulties are suggested as to their marching out of the land of Egypt, "bringing with them (it is said) the sick and infirm." (p. 62.) How strange that it should have been forgotten that the Psalmist mentions, as a remarkable proof of God's providence, that "there was not one feeble person among their tribes." (Psalm cv. 37.)

Again: it is stated as impossible that such a vast multitude should have assembled at the door of the tabernacle, and that they should have been addressed in one assembly by Moses, and afterwards by Joshua. (chap. v.) It was of course impossible that every individual could have approached near the tabernacle at one time, or that all should have been within reach of the voice of a single speaker; but it is only straining Scripture to force upon it such a meaning.

Moreover, while we contend that the Pentateuch was written by Moses, and that its contents are strictly historical, we do not for a moment deny that it is not only possible, but highly probable, that in a book of such ancient date mistakes may from time to time have been made through the carelessness of copyists.

This was especially likely to occur with regard to numbers, which the Jews often represented by the letters of the Hebrew alphabet. And it is quite conceivable, that as some have supposed, the number of the children of Israel may have been considerably less than that which we find stated in our present copies of the Pentateuch.

The difficulty of supplying such multitudes with food and drink in the wilderness is, of course, utterly insurmountable to those who deny the possibility of miracles. But those who receive the Scriptures as the word of God, believe that the people were miraculously fed by manna from heaven, a fact which is attested by our Lord Himself, (John vi. 31, 32); and again, that the smitten rock not only supplied them with water while they remained in its neighbourhood, but sent forth copious streams, which "followed them" during a part at least of their subsequent journeys. (1 Cor. x. 4.)

Much stress is also laid on the impossibility of finding herbage in the wilderness for the numerous cattle of the Israelites (chap. xii.) but enlightened and accurate modern travellers have expressed their belief that herbage and vegetation were much more abundant there in former times, than at present. And at the very time when God called Moses to lead the children of Israel out of Egypt, he was feeding his flock close by Horeb; no doubt because there was abundant pasture there.

Again, it is objected that it was impossible for three priests, Aaron and his two sons, to kill the Passover lambs, which would be required for so vast a multitude (chap. xxi.) We at once admit the impossibility, but we deny that there was any law obliging the priests to do so. It is probable that each head of the family, at least in the early period of Jewish history, killed his own Passover lamb.*

Again: the difficulty suggested of procuring turtle doves, or pigeons, in sufficient number, and of the enormous labour which would be thrown upon three priests in offering them in sacrifice in each case of childbirth, (chap. xx.) may fairly be met by saying that there is every reason to believe that many such institutions were necessarily suspended until the arrival of Israel in the land

* The circumstances mentioned 2 Chron. xxx. 16, and xxxv. 11, appear to have been exceptional.

of Canaan. If no birds could be procured in the wilderness for the appointed sacrifice, there could be no sin in omitting to offer them.

As a proof of this, I may remind you that the rite of Circumcision, which by the law was to take place on the eighth day, was omitted during the whole of the forty years spent in the wilderness, "They had not circumcised their children by the way." (Joshua iv. 7.) It appears, too, that the Passover was observed only once during that period of forty years. (Numbers ix. 5.) And Moses thus refers to many similar irregularities: "Ye shall not do after all the things that we do here this day, every man whatsoever is right in his own eyes. For ye are not yet come to the rest and to the inheritance which the Lord your God giveth you." (Deut. xii. 8, 9.)

And now I must bring to a close the painful task which I have thought it my duty to take in hand. It is indeed distressing to speak thus of one whose office demands our respect, one whom his labours among the heathen in a distant colony would lead us to regard as an earnest and conscientious man.

But is it not to be deeply regretted that such a man, holding such an office, should have thus rashly and hastily published to the world doubts and difficulties, which, by his own acknowledgment, have only within a recent period developed themselves to his mind? Must we not mourn, when we think how much evil must follow the publication of such a book—evil which can never be entirely neutralized and undone; how many intelligent, but not deeply read young men may be led astray; how great an opportunity has been afforded to the scoffer and the infidel to blaspheme and triumph against the truth.

What then shall I say in conclusion? Shall I exhort you to close the earlier portion of your Bibles, and never again to study the Books of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, for fear of having your faith unsettled by doubts and difficulties which you cannot solve? On the contrary, I would earnestly urge upon you the words of our Lord (verse 39), "SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES," the Old Testament Scriptures; you cannot search them too often, or too thoroughly. But while you search them, do not forget also to pray over them—to pray

for the spirit of humility, of wisdom, of understanding. In short, pray the prayer of the Psalmist, "Open Thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of Thy law." (Ps. cxix. 18.)

Above all, let us seek, each in our own experience, to realize the Lord Jesus Christ as our Saviour. Let us carry to Him all our sins, all our wants, all our doubts, all our difficulties. He will make all needful things plain to us, and give us grace to wait patiently, until increased light shall clear up the difficulties which may still remain, "until the day break, and the shadows flee away;" and then IN HIS LIGHT WE SHALL SEE LIGHT. (Psalm xxxvi. 9.)

